

## The Plan by PaperBodies

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**Summary:**

Steve leaned on the kitchen table, chin on his folded arms, and watched the raindrops sliding down the outside of the apartment window. The fact that it was raining, on today of all days, felt deeply unfair. Wasn't the whole point of California that it never rained here? All Steve had wanted was to do something nice for Billy, something to make up for...well. In all honesty, he wasn't entirely sure what he was making up for, but he vividly recalled the expression on Billy's face during the argument, and he was smart enough to know he had caused it somehow. So he had made a plan. A plan to ensure that spring break started out as successfully as possible, in the hopes that it would continue successfully from there. And now it was raining. Sometimes Steve wondered if the universe just genuinely enjoyed fucking with him.

## The Plan

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He heard the door to Billy's room open behind him and tried to school his expression into something more neutral than bitter disappointment. He and Billy had been at least sort of friends for a while now, and had been living together since they moved out here last summer. It was more than enough time for Billy to be able to read Steve like a book, and the last thing Steve needed was to have to explain his disappointment about the plan. He wasn't entirely sure he could explain the reasoning behind the plan to himself, so he really didn't want to have to try to explain it to Billy. He wasn't sure he could take the mockery that would almost certainly ensue. Billy was different in a lot of ways, after everything, but he was still kind of a dick. Steve was pretty sure that was at least partly baked into Billy's DNA.

It had been a little surprising to everyone when Steve had announced he was moving to California with Billy Hargrove to attend community college. Steve had even surprised himself a little bit with that decision, honestly. Robin had left for college in New York a few weeks prior and had invited Steve to come with her, but she had always been a very perceptive friend with an inconvenient habit of noticing when Steve was drowning. She had done a lot for him over the year after Starcourt, and he had wanted to give her a fresh start in New York without a roommate she had to worry about all the

time. Billy, on the other hand, had offered up his passenger seat and would be the kind of roommate, Steve had assumed, who would ask precisely zero questions when Steve sometimes wanted to stay in his bedroom with the lights off for days at a time. So he had accepted the offer of the passenger seat, and he and Billy Hargrove had picked out an apartment.

As it turned out, though, Steve had assumed incorrectly. Billy might not have an actual reason to give a fuck about Steve Harrington, but he was somehow even more persistent than Robin had been when it came to things like making Steve get out of bed and shower regularly, or asking if Steve had eaten anything recently, or even occasionally sitting down and talking Steve through the extremely basic process of breathing. It was super fucking annoying, and it made Steve feel more cared for than he maybe ever had, and he tried not to think about that too much because it wasn't Billy's fault that Steve responded to a basic amount of care by developing a massive crush, and actually none of that was the point right now. Right now, he had to fix his face before Billy saw it, or he was going to have to explain why he was upset, and that meant talking about the plan. Steve took a breath and tried to look fine.

Billy sat down at the table and looked at Steve, who was still staring out the window.

"What's got you all mopey?" Billy asked, so Steve had definitely nailed the whole expression thing.

"I'm fine," Steve said, and it was a lot less convincing than he had been hoping for. Billy just stared at him, and Steve kept his eyes on the rain. It was coming down harder now, as if the universe was really trying to drive home how stupid the plan had been in the first place. Steve felt Billy's eyes on him for a moment longer, and then Billy stood up. Steve heard the sounds of him making a smoothie and poked listlessly at the soggy remains of his cereal. He tried not to think about how today was supposed to be perfect, and now it wasn't.

Billy was back just a few moments later, a dark purple smoothie in hand. He handed Steve a smaller cup with the extra in it, like he always did. Billy made the best smoothies.

“So,” he said as he slid back into his chair across the table from Steve, “what are you so upset about? We’re staring down two weeks of no classes, you passed all your midterms, and the nerds and Robin are all coming out to visit for summer in, like, two months.” Billy narrowed his eyes. “Are you upset that you’re not going back to Hawkins for break?” The question was a little cautious, and Steve shook his head immediately. He had no desire to restart the argument, and he wasn’t actually upset about not going back home—back to Hawkins.

He thought briefly about just...confessing. Admitting that he cared, probably a little too much, about making Billy happy, and then probably finding out once and for all that this thing was entirely one-sided. But then he was probably going to have to move, and he really didn’t want to do that. So he didn’t say it.

“I made plans for today,” he admitted instead. Billy’s eyebrows went up.

“Plans aside from hanging out on the couch, watching movies, and smoking these?” Billy placed a baggie of perfectly rolled joints on the table.

“Yes,” Steve said, although that sounded like a pretty great rainy day.

“Ambitious,” Billy said drily, and Steve huffed. He was pretty sure this was just the tip of the mockery iceberg, but still.

“So what were you going to do?” Billy asked after a silence. Steve wrestled with it for a moment, and then rolled his eyes. Billy wasn’t going to stop until he pried at least some answers out of Steve, so he might as well confess to this much. He unlocked his phone and pulled up the confirmation email. He slid it across the table toward Billy.

“We,” Steve said, “were going to go roller skating along the marina.” Billy’s eyes widened. He looked at the phone and back at Steve.

“Roller skating,” he said, and Steve couldn’t get a handle on his tone. Steve smiled despite himself, though, because he was confident about this part of the plan. He had thought about it a lot.

“Oh come on,” he said with a little smile, “like you wouldn’t Instagram the shit out of roller skating at the waterfront.” Billy looked at him, and Steve continued, “It’s retro enough to fit your whole throwback *aesthetic*, and you can take enough pictures of boats and the water to really rub it in that you live on the ‘best coast.’” He did finger quotes on ‘best coast’ because he was absolutely quoting Billy. Billy opened his mouth to say something—probably a joke about how he didn’t know that Steve even knew the word *aesthetic*—but he took a closer look at Steve’s face and evidently thought better of it. Instead, he looked at the fat raindrops splattering the windowpane, and then back at Steve. A slow smile spread across his face.

“Well then what are we waiting for?” Billy asked with a grin. Steve looked from him to the window and back.

“It’s raining,” he said flatly. Billy’s smile went wider.

“So you’re telling me that you made this reservation—“ he glanced back down at Steve’s phone—“three weeks ago, and you’re going to let a few April showers stand in the way of a great plan?” Steve flushed bright red. The date on that reservation was something he hadn’t actually intended to share. He hoped Billy wouldn’t ask about it. It took a minute for Billy calling it a *great plan* to land, but when it did, Steve smiled.

“I knew you’d love it,” he said a little smugly.

“No you didn’t, or you wouldn’t be so happy that I just called it a great plan,” Billy shot back, and Steve wasn’t sure why Billy had to be so mean, and also so right all the time. It was deeply unfair. He tried to come up with a snarky response, but Billy was already standing up from the table.

“Get your raincoat,” Billy said as he put his smoothie glass in the sink and walked off toward his room. “I’m getting dressed and then we’re going roller skating.”

The rental shop was open, though the guy behind the counter was

clearly not expecting anyone to actually show up. He kept shooting worried glances out the door, to where the pavement was wet and covered in puddles. He asked them repeatedly, as they signed the paperwork, if they understood that the company renting them the skates was not responsible for any injury they might sustain. *While being idiots in the rain* went unspoken, but was clearly implied.

Once they had their skates on, it went better than Steve had anticipated. The rain, after the first half hour, was barely even noticeable, since they were both basically soaked through. Steve hadn't roller skated in years, but he was steadier on his feet than he had any right to be. Billy spent the first ten minutes filming Steve, no doubt in the hopes of catching him eating it on the sidewalk. Steve had several wobbly moments where he was sure he looked ridiculous, but he took pride in the fact that he managed not to fall. Eventually Billy put away his phone and started actually trying to skate himself. He was shakier than Steve had been to start, but he adapted quickly, as usual. Soon they were gliding along the concrete path pretty successfully, stopping often to look at the rain coming down over the marina and the bay. Billy skated straight into every puddle he could find, and was happiest when he could manage to splash Steve.

They made their way out to the end of the waterfront and sat down to rest on a rocky jetty. Steve raised his face to the sky. The rain had slackened a bit, but was still falling steadily. He closed his eyes and let it cool his flushed face. He felt Billy's shoulder warm against his own, even through his raincoat. Billy hadn't bothered with a jacket.

"So why roller skating?" Billy asked. He sounded curious rather than mocking, which was promising. Steve kept his eyes closed and shrugged.

"Like I said before, I thought you'd like it," he said, hoping Billy would leave it alone and knowing he wouldn't.

"Okay," Billy said slowly. "But why make the plan at all?" Steve tried one more time to avoid this conversation.

"We're always either working or doing school stuff. I thought we could use the break." Billy just sighed.

"You made the reservation the same day we had that argument," Billy said quietly, and it was Steve's turn to sigh. He didn't want to talk about this, and now he was going to have to. He tilted his head further back, but didn't open his eyes. He focused on the sensation of raindrops on his face for a long moment before he spoke. He kept his voice quiet even though they were alone on the jetty, and he chose his words carefully.

"A few days before the argument, you asked me if I was going home for spring break. I said that I hadn't decided, and then I asked you the same question. You eventually just said no, but I could tell that something about it bothered you. So I started thinking about it, and you almost never use that word. I'm pretty sure I've only heard you say it one time, and it was when you were being an absolute dick about carpooling to that stupid festival. You asked me how I was planning to get *home*, and I said I could find another ride back to *the apartment*, and you were mad at me for a week. At the time, I didn't understand why it pissed you off so much. I probably still don't fully get it, but I think I'm starting to understand a little better." Steve paused, thinking about empty houses and unsafe houses and how he wanted to say the rest of it.

"And?" Billy eventually prompted when Steve didn't continue fast enough.

"Jesus Christ," Steve muttered under his breath. "Give me a second. Or, you know, you could try just...letting something go for once."

"Doesn't sound like me," Billy murmured, but he bumped Steve's shoulder with his own encouragingly. Steve finally opened his eyes and looked over. Billy's eyes were wide and blue and had some emotion Steve couldn't identify in them. Steve tried not to think about what it could be. He looked back out at the water in front of him.

"And then we had that stupid argument, and I said a lot of shit I didn't feel good about and didn't mean about you and Hawkins and your terrible mood, but for some reason it was worse than usual. You never want to go back, and I totally get it, and I'm sorry I kept asking about it, but something I said or did this time made it way worse." Steve paused again, not sure where to go from here.

"That's why you decided not to go back to Hawkins," Billy said eventually. "Because of that fight."

"I mean, I mostly decided not to go back because I kind of hate it there sometimes, and they're all coming here in a couple of months anyway," Steve said, "but that was also part of it, yeah." He shot Billy a small smile, but Billy was staring straight ahead. "I knew if I left you here by yourself, it would probably be bad. It took long enough to pull you out of it after Christmas. I couldn't ask you to come with me, so I just decided to stay." Steve tried to keep his voice light, but it still felt like admitting a lot. Just how closely he paid attention to Billy and his moods was a thing he would rather have kept to himself. But it was out there now, and there was nothing to do but wait and see how Billy was going to react. Steve shot him a sidelong glance to see if it seemed like he was angry, but he was still staring out at the water, expression unreadable.

"So I was a total dick to you, and your response was to make plans to go roller skating because you thought I would like it," Billy said flatly.

"No?" Steve said because that's not what happened. "I planned roller skating because something about spring break has had you in a shitty mood for a while now, and I thought maybe if we did something fun on the first day, it would, you know, get things off on the right foot. I also planned it because I said or did something during that argument that actually really upset you, and I still don't know what it was, but I feel like a dick about it anyway."

"Steve," Billy said, and it sounded a little like he was pleading. "It isn't...it wasn't..." He took a deep breath and paused for a long moment. "I really fucking hate this time of year," he finally said slowly. "My parents sent me to a week of camp over spring break one year when I was about twelve." His voice had taken on that flat, toneless quality that it often got whenever Billy got anywhere close to the topic of his mom. Steve pressed his shoulder a little harder into Billy's, and felt relieved when Billy didn't pull away. "It was some sports camp, I think. I don't really remember much about it. When I got home on Friday afternoon, my mom was gone." Steve's head snapped up so he could look at Billy's face, but he was still staring resolutely out at the water. His shoulders were tight and his jaw was



set. "Most of her stuff was gone and my dad wouldn't tell me where she was. The only thing he ever told me about it was that she was gone now, and we were just going to have to 'soldier through.' I found out later that he had her involuntarily committed. She had been struggling for a while, but he never wanted her to actually talk to someone about it. He just waited until I left and then dumped her in some facility. She spent the next few years in and out of mental hospitals, and then the years after that going in and out of rehab. I didn't see her again before she died. I found her sister right before we moved to Hawkins, and she told me about it."

"Jesus fucking Christ, Billy," Steve whispered, slowly reaching out to lay his hand over Billy's. Billy didn't pull away, so Steve left his hand there.

"No one's ever asked before," Billy said slowly. "About spring. I've hated the entire concept of spring break since I was twelve, and no one's ever said anything about it before."

"I'm so sorry," Steve said, feeling even worse than before. "Oh my God, during that fight I said that you had two weeks of vacation coming up and you were acting like somebody *died*." Steve put his hands over his face. "I'm such a fucking asshole." He dropped his hands and looked over at Billy, hoping he could find some way to say it so that Billy would understand—

—but then Billy was leaning toward him, and then Billy's lips were on his and all of Steve's thoughts left his head at the same time. Kissing, though. Kissing he was good at. It took him just a moment to get his bearings, and then Steve was turning his head to get a better angle and deepen the kiss. He had wanted to do this for a long time, so he wasn't about to waste the opportunity. When they finally pulled apart to breathe, Billy spoke before Steve could.

"What I was trying to say," he said seriously, "is that no one has ever asked me why I'm upset, much less gone out of their way to plan an activity to make me feel better." He looked up at the rain for a long moment and took a breath. "I've wanted to do that for a long time," he admitted, "and I only waited because I thought you'd get over it eventually." He glanced at Steve and then looked away. "We don't have the best history, and I figured you'd start attending classes and

meeting people, and you'd realize that there are a lot of people out there who have a lot less baggage than I do, and you'd eventually stop looking at me like that—" Billy ran a thumb over Steve's cheekbone and Steve couldn't help himself from leaning into the contact a little bit— "and that would probably be better for you in the long run. But you didn't stop. And you just keep doing shit like this," Billy said.

"Making overly-complicated plans so I never actually have to have a conversation to resolve an argument?" Steve asked with a rueful smile.

"Caring about how I feel, dumbass," Billy replied with a shove to Steve's shoulder. "Continuing to do thoughtful shit for me even though I sometimes actively make it difficult for you to be nice to me," Billy said.

"Hey," Steve said softly, with a shrug that did nothing to conceal how emotional he was, "it's not like I'm baggage-free. I'm pretty sure you could find someone to be nice to you who doesn't just...entirely forget how to breathe sometimes." Billy looked at him for a long moment and then smiled.

"Nah," he said. Then he narrowed his eyes thoughtfully. "You said 'overly-complicated plans.'" Steve closed his eyes and winced. "You had more stuff planned for today," Billy said. It wasn't a question.

"Nothing major," Steve said. "After we were done skating, I thought we could go to that taco place you like down by the water. And then I may have signed us up for—" Billy cut him off with another kiss. Then he pulled back to get to his feet and held a hand out to help Steve up.

"Here's what we're going to do," he said. "We're going to go pick up tacos because I fucking love those tacos, and then we're going to take them back to the apartment—" Steve was already shaking his head. "What?" Billy demanded.

"I think what you meant to say," Steve said, pulling Billy toward him on his skates, "was that we're going to take them *home*, and—"

Once again, Billy cut him off before he could finish his sentence.

**Author's Note:**

I am late to the party for the Harringrove April Challenge, so I combined the prompts for days 1-4 (first kiss, April showers, spring break, and roller skates) and got this bad boy. I hope you like it!